

CONGRESSMAN MARK FOLEY

Statement for the  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
Oversight Hearing on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan:  
The First Major Projects

July 22, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for holding this hearing on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. I believe it is extremely important that we do this as we move closer with the implementation of the first initial projects like the one in my district, Indian River Lagoon-South and others, such as Southern Golden Gates Estates Restoration in Collier County.

When Congress passed the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), we reaffirmed the nation's commitment to America's most imperiled natural treasure. For almost 45 years, there has been a steady stream of clear and compelling scientific data detailing the perilous state of the Everglades—unnatural levels of freshwater in our estuaries, lesions on our fish, deposits of muck and phosphorous in our lakes and canals and the decline of wading birds.

CERP represented an historic partnership between all stakeholders. Agricultural interests, the Administration, utilities, the state of Florida, Indian Tribes, and environmental groups came together in an unprecedented show of cooperation to develop a plan that will protect and preserve our ecosystem. It built upon the initial commitment we as a Congress made, at my request, to provide \$200 million in federal funds for Florida's Everglades restoration efforts back in the 1996 Farm Bill.

Mr. Chairman, we are now at a crossroad and timing is critical. The Indian River Lagoon Plan-South (IRL) is one of the first significant elements of CERP and it is responsible for critically addressing environmental abuses visited on the St. Lucie River, Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee by the old Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project.

The Indian River Lagoon is a 156-mile long estuary located at the mouth of the St. Lucie River in Martin County, Florida, which is part of my congressional district. It is home to more than 4,300 species of plants and animals, and supports an annual economic contribution of more than \$730 million.

My constituents in Martin County have been extremely instrumental in their support for the project. Not only did they organize numerous rallies and write thousands of support letters but they also voted for a three-year, one-cent sales tax to contribute over \$50 million in revenue for the IRL plan effort.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, did a tremendous job working in conjunction with its partner, the South Florida Water Management District, finishing the final Project Implementation Report for the IRL this past spring. I would like to commend Col. Carpenter and Henry Dean, the executive director of the South Florida Water Management District for their and their staff's work.

As we wait for a favorable report by the Chief of Engineers of the Corps, Lieutenant General Strock, and for a Water Resources Development Act, I introduced H.R. 4344, which would authorize both the Indian River Lagoon Plan-South and the Southern Golden Gates Estates Restoration. It is the companion bill to S. 2209, introduced by Senator Bob Graham. I am grateful to my colleagues, Alcee L. Hastings and Mario Diaz-Balart for co-sponsoring this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot wait further for authorization of these projects. It needs to occur this year. The success of CERP depends upon it and I believe we should not falter in our commitment to it. I would implore your panel to work with the Senate to ensure this project is authorized this year so we can secure the funds needed to begin it. Thank you.